

Jackson

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SPEAKERS

Robert Curvin, Lisa Keller, Unidentified man, Pat Curvin, Ken Jackson

R

Robert Curvin 00:00

studies and it's very clear that at some point the Crips and the Bloods decided to go national. And indeed, international with the website. Yeah. And they've they've, they've had an impact, then you have you have a culture of an entertainment culture that largely supports this kind of thing and also a taste of what's really very interesting. A one of the sites, they have a listing of artists who have once been part of the gangs. And it also includes professional athletes and whatnot, who all have at some point, at least, they claim on the site, were once a part of one of the cells or one of the units of the gang

L

Lisa Keller 00:53

The organization in New York has cut down on this in a systematic fashion to create this order system. But that wasn't the case when I left 14th Street in 1960, the gang warfare was through the roof. So you know, they were pockets. There's no consistency, there's pockets of up and down, am I in your way here?

K

Ken Jackson 01:13

But you know I want to ask you while Pat's here since you were married. And since we got a piece of paper, about the Newark the earlier thing, the early 60s, I mean, before the riots and stuff like this, yeah. And what you were you came back in 57. And (unintelligable) Princeton, and when did you move back to Newark before you moved here?

R

Robert Curvin 01:38

I didn't go away to Princeton until 1970. Okay, 70. So I was here all through.



K Ken Jackson 01:43
All through and what we're doing from 57 to 70?

R Robert Curvin 01:46
To 70? Well, from 57 to 60,

K Ken Jackson 01:50
other than being married to her,

R Robert Curvin 01:52
I went to college, and at Rutgers, downtown Newark, so I was

K Ken Jackson 01:59
That was almost when it was getting started, wasn't it?

R Robert Curvin 02:01
Well, in a way. There were a number of us at Rutgers who actually created the first college chapter at records of the NAACP, and so we were, there was a few of us, who later became politically active too like Bill Payne, who was an assemblyman here and has run for office over and over again, he's the brother of Donald Payne, the congressman from the area. But we were active. Actually, from the time we were teenagers, even before I went away to the army, we were in the youth chapter of the NAACP. So there was a core, there was a core of us. A few African Americans, and the rest were mainly Jewish kids from the suburbs, who were with us, we went to, like, as a teenager, I remember going out to Dreamland, a skating rink, in Elizabeth, where they wouldn't let walk skate on Sundays. And actually, it was only one night of the week where African Americans could go skating. And we would go out there.

K Ken Jackson 03:13
That was where Elizabeth?

R Robert Curvin 03:16
Skating rink, very popular. On Thursday night, the place was packed. I mean, part of in fact, the socialization process of growing up in this area was at some point, you had to become a skater, and go to Dreamland, to meet girls and hang out with the guys and all that kind of thing. Which, actually, I'll tell you, it's interesting story related to that-

P

Pat Curvin 03:41

[Did you meet there?] No.

R

Robert Curvin 03:45

Pat was not around at the time.

P

Pat Curvin 03:46

I'm not in New Jersey at the time.

R

Robert Curvin 03:48

But so from, but in 1960, I got out of college. And that was about the time that the Freedom Rides were beginning. And it was very clear, to me at least my own perception was that the NAACP was very conservative, largely coopted by the local governmental leaders. And I guess, at this point in my life, I'm a little less critical of the kind of things that they did, because, you know, their job was to try to get the first black magistrate, the first black principal and things like that and they did that. But they totally resisted, and were made uncomfortable, in fact, by the younger folks who were saying that, you know, we've got to criticize the corporations. We've got to go downtown and and bargain with

K

Ken Jackson 04:56

The Urban League were active in Newark or not?

R

Robert Curvin 05:00

Well, the Urban League, the Urban League was very interesting, because I mean, I, I've never had any expectation that they were going to be out on a picket line and their job was, in fact to try to work with business to change from within and indeed, on a number of occasions, when we, after we formed CORE that's the point I want to make that when I was felt that I just really could not work within the NAACP. A few people came along from the National Office of CORE trying to put together CORE chapters, and I was approached by a gentleman named Newell Weber. And he has asked me if I would be interested in helping to found a CORE chapter in Newark. And I said I would, and at the same time, someone was also working with a group in East Orange, and they were forming a CORE chapter. So the national office wisely said, "You know, we don't need to chapters next door to each other, why don't you guys get together?" And we spent weeks actually negotiating a merger. And we ended up with an organization called in Newrk-Essex CORE. and I became the first I guess, the first chairman of the chapter. This was about 1961, I guess. And, uh,

K

Ken Jackson 05:35

Were you working full time as organizer?

R

Robert Curvin 06:44

No, no. And, you know, this is, you know, again, at the risk of sounding immodest about this, I see, I see so many people, you know, talk about, you know, what they did, on their jobs. What we did in CORE we all did as volunteers. We were all working on, in most cases, full time jobs.

P

Pat Curvin 07:12

CORE started at 4:30 in the afternoon, right?

R

Robert Curvin 07:14

Yep, some of us were teachers, some of us were caseworkers, as I was, I worked for the County Welfare Board, as a caseworker. There were others who were really literally working class people who work in factories and some worked in businesses. But and we were a very well integrated group. We had a very solid membership from the suburbs, largely Jewish, but also, many young kids who were not Jewish, who were working with us and picketing with us when we, we felt that we had to. But one of the things I wanted to get back to the Dreamland thing, there was a White Castle restaurant

K

Ken Jackson 08:09

They call it Crystals in the south

R

Robert Curvin 08:11

Oh, really? White Castle restaurant where you know, the cheapest food on Earth. On Thursday nights after African Americans would go to Dreamland, they would all congregate at White Castle.

K

Ken Jackson 08:25

In Elizabeth?

R

Robert Curvin 08:27

In Elizabeth? No, it was actually in Newark, but it was on Elizabeth Avenue. It was actually the same street that ran right through Newark into Elizabeth. And White Castle had all white waitresses, and blacks could not be hired to serve these cheaper than you can believe

hamburgers.

K

Ken Jackson 08:50

12 cents. (background conversation)

R

Robert Curvin 08:54

So we we said, you know, how do we really get at this? You know, we were we would always write letters to the firm and usually get ignored. And so we said, how can we get, you know, wake up White Castle. So we said Thursday night, skating night, when you know, we have a ready made rally. All of these African American kids of driving their cars coming from skating. Now they're going to be little angry that they can't get their hamburgers, but this will be very interesting. So that night, one Thursday night, we put a picket line around White Castle. And it was really quite a scene because it took a while before we could convince the skaters to stay out. You know, a few of them were really upset, they wanted to go in anyway. And then we had you know, it was a teachable moment. So we had a chance to really make the case that we could actually change things, and then they all started, and they joined us, you know, they start hooting the horns. And what before long, I tell you, I don't know how many policemen were there. But there were so many police officers that I think they probably were more policemen, than pickets, because they thought for sure there was going to be some kind of major incident. But we were marching around this White Castle, which was right on a corner with a parking lot. And we literally shut the place down. Before long there was not a single customer in the place and as long as we stayed there, there was not a single customer.

P

Pat Curvin 10:42

What year would that have been? Because I wasn't married to you at that time.

R

Robert Curvin 10:47

You weren't? Yes, you were.

P

Pat Curvin 10:49

You said you came from skating. We never did skating.

R

Robert Curvin 10:52

No, we no, we weren't out at skating (?)

P

Pat Curvin 10:55

Technically the 29th of the month, which is March. And we have a nice trip (unintelligable) in June.

R

Robert Curvin 11:02

(Background chatter). Yeah. Well, anyway, let me tell you what the police did. So finally, the police and we were singing freedom songs as we were marching around. The police arrested everyone on the picket line, except me. And this was, you know, kind of a, I guess it was their way of saying we're not going to make this guy a hero. We're not going, this is our tactics. So they isolated me from the group. But fortunately, then I was able to go organize the bail, which I got my, my older brother who was, uh, very kind and generous and supportive. And he actually put up the bond to get everybody out that evening. And eventually the charges were [all dropped].

K

Ken Jackson 11:56

Did they know you were the leader is that why they [unintelligable]

R

Robert Curvin 11:59

Oh, yeah. I was by this time I was I was pretty well known and identified and, and targeted and

K

Ken Jackson 12:06

Did the police were the police personally, verbally or otherwise abusive to you?

R

Robert Curvin 12:11

Uh, not not usually directly. There were there were a few.

K

Ken Jackson 12:18

Did you know, some of them?

R

Robert Curvin 12:19

Oh, I knew a lot of them yeah. But there were a few who were tried to, tried to intimidate me.

K

Ken Jackson 12:27

Who's the mayor then?

R

Robert Curvin 12:28

The mayor was Addonizio then.

L

Lisa Keller 12:30

You don't remember what year?

R

Robert Curvin 12:32

The White Castle demonstration?

P

Pat Curvin 12:36

It's got to be after 62. Because Frankie was born in 62, so it's gotta be 63, 64. Yeah. Because he's a little guy and I used to take off to the (unintelligible). But that was one of many demonstration there was housing and unemployment and-

L

Lisa Keller 12:54

Did White Castle change after this?

R

Robert Curvin 12:56

Well, within a month there were Black waitresses at White Castle. Yeah. You know, first there was one and then there was two. But yes, indeed. Because the reality was, which they understood very well, that if they were going to continue to do business in his neighborhood, they would have to hire black waitresses. We, uh-

K

Ken Jackson 13:26

Haad there not been, to your knowledge, many successful such pickets and demonstrations that had had that kind of tangible success? In the 50s or something like that? Were they really a particular restaurant or-?

R

Robert Curvin 13:42

There were a lot of those kinds of demonstrations around the country, but particularly here in Newark.

K

Ken Jackson 13:50

And Addonizio was not sensitive enough to the shall we say black vote that he would have intervened?

R

Robert Curvin 13:58

Well, I'll tell you how Addonizio intervened and one of the there's a young woman by the name of Julia Rabig, by the way, R-A-B-I-G do you know her, have you met her? She's at Rochester right now. But she's just finishing up a dissertation at Penn on Newark. And she is really honing in on employment and jobs and the role of the civil rights movement in dealing with things like affirmative action plans and all that

K

Ken Jackson 14:39

History or Polisci or?

R

Robert Curvin 14:41

She didn't- I think she's in history. Yeah. But she has a, she has a chapter that she shared with me on what I consider to be the sort of the watershed demonstration that changed the way in which we were approaching the city, the civil rights groups, particularly CORE and others that we were working with approached things in Newark and that was in June of 1963. A coalition of groups including CORE but under the banner of the Newark Coordinating Council, held a demonstration at a construction site at a Barringer High School in the North Ward. And the demonstration, we I don't know how what the number was, but we showed up at the site with a large number of black and white demonstrators, including a man by the name of George Richardson, who had been an assemblyman and was also a very big supporter of Addonizio when at Addonizio was elected, but shortly afterwards-

K

Ken Jackson 16:03

Was George Richardson Black or white?

R

Robert Curvin 16:04

Black he was Black. But George George had been invited as a city employee to join a discussion that CORE was having with the mayor about police brutality. And we were in this sitting in the mayor's office, George was sitting over there, like next to the mayor. And, and we're telling the mayor that, you know, we have to have a review board or something's got to be done to stop the way in which police were behaving. And the mayor is, obviously brought George in to support him. And at some point in the conversation, George says, "You know, Mayor, I agree with what they're saying, you know, this can't continue like this. You know, I have lots of friends who know, who've had experiences like this and on and on and on." Well, the next week,

George no longer had a job at City Hall. He was fired. What was his job? He was he was, he had a, you know, these politicians, they all get a get a day job, you know, to supplement their salary. He was working in the insurance fund. There's apparently there's an office,

K

Ken Jackson 17:18

But he was he had an elected job too?

R

Robert Curvin 17:20

He was an assemblyman.

K

Ken Jackson 17:21

But he didn't get paid for that job. He also had another job for the city.

R

Robert Curvin 17:24

Well, he, I don't know he may have received a minimal salary for being assemblyman. But he also had another job as on the Insurance Commission for the city. Well, he not only lost the job, but when he was up for reelection, he could not get the support of the Democratic Party and he lost his seat in the Assembly. And he became, in turn a very strong supporter of CORE and, and what, to the Civil Rights Coalition, a good number of people that he knew very well and that had worked with him and were part of this group called the Newark Coordinating Council. Anyway, we had this demonstration at Barringer and when the workers showed up, the demonstrators were blocking the paths to the site. And the workers, all white, got together and charged the picket line and a fracas broke out. And the police waded in. And I think the only people arrested were two demonstrators, but the workers actually went into the site. But there were, there was lots of attention on this than it was on the news and the next day headline in the local papers about demonstrations. And the mayor ordered a stop to the construction. And then began putting together a-

K

Ken Jackson 19:07

So he wasn't afraid this fire Richardson or whatever? But at some point he didn't want not for any moral reasons, but at some point, he said this was going have a cost to it? Addonizio.

R

Robert Curvin 19:19

Addonizio. Yeah, but I think that and this is the point that I want to make.

K

Ken Jackson 19:24

He stopped the construction because he-

R

Robert Curvin 19:25

He stopped the construction. But then he went on to manage the negotiations about this in a way that marginalized the representatives of the demonstrators. So ultimately, he chose to choose those who could who could negotiate with the unions for a change in policy. And I think that uh, the Civil Rights forces may have had about two or three members on the committee. But the rest of the committee included representatives from the churches of conservative ministers by and large, representatives from the NAACP, who were, again, quite conservative and we're not going to take on the unions. And the upshot was that we ended up with no jobs.

K

Ken Jackson 20:23

Did you ever know a guy in Newark, ran a black newspaper, I want to say his name was Owen? Jersey City, some newspaper I wish I wish I could remember his name I've got it written down somewhere. I talked to him along-

R

Robert Curvin 20:41

Was it the Herald news or the Afro American?

K

Ken Jackson 20:44

Probably Afro American.

R

Robert Curvin 20:45

Because the Afro American had a, you know, the Murray Family from Baltimore. They had a they had a paper here in Newark during that period. This was this I think, was a Jersey City. A Jersey City Paper, no

K

Ken Jackson 20:57

But it was it was it was a it was an African American paper. Pretty sure. I mean, I you know, at my age, my memory is fun. But anyway, I remember interviewing him a long time ago, maybe 40 years. And he told me that he was a minor part, as the black community in Jersey City was not very large. Compared to Newark. But that Frank Hague wanted every vote because he wanted to control New Jersey or the Hudson County machine. He wanted to win 100,000 to 16, you know, something like that. And it mattered to him. You know, I'm not saying the story is true, but he did tell me this. He said one time he was in Frank Hague's office. And this probably was relatively late in Hague's rule it was probably the 40s late 30s or 40s. And before that, he said he had been at a restaurant in Jersey City, which you know, in ways familiar I'm sure to lots of Black citizens he was treated with at best disrespect [wants you to be what was not forgiven

for not arrested disrespect. ??] In other words, they really weren't gonna get it on him or whatever it's gonna do. It's clear we don't want you in here. And I don't think they threw him out or arrested him or anything. And so he was in Hague's office, he said a month or some period of time later. And Hague asked him how things were going, everybody treating you fine. (Unintelligible) whatever his name was. And for some reason, he brought this thing up. Not that the Black vote was important, but he was part of that vote. Anyway, he told me he says, Hague picked up to telephone, right then and there. Called the guy up who ran the restaurant, whose name I've forgotten, and said, "Joe, my buddy here Owen, African American, or whatever you call it was in your restaurant month ago, and tells me he wasn't treated, the way he'd like to be treated. If it happens in you're out of business." Now, again, I don't know if that's true. But everybody knows Hague could have done that. Hague said you're out of business in Jersey City-

R

Robert Curvin 23:16

You'd be out of business exactly.

K

Ken Jackson 23:20

And not because the black vote was gonna elect him but because he wanted to win by 100,000 votes in Hudson County. Now, I don't know if that was true. But what I guess I'm saying is, Hague in many ways, a terrible man. But also a man who would recognize the importance of a vote un New Jersey. He said I need you and I need you more than I need this guy just running this damn restaurant. Anyway, when I guess I'm saying is nobody in Newark, certainly not Addonizio ever took that view that I I want your vote, Bob Curvin. More than whoever else's vote, I'm gonna offend on this.

R

Robert Curvin 24:03

We could talk about this for days because I think this is really a very complicated question. And the answer is not just, you know, yes or no, because I think Addonizio did in some ways recognize the importance of the emerging block constituency, the kind of demands that were being made. But I think that in some ways A) he was not very sensitive himself. B) He couldn't keep up with the expectations that Blacks had. And C) he was also focused on a lot of corrupt things that I think distracted him from really focusing on this emerging social revolution that was taking place in his midst. Now what makes the conversation I think a little bit more complicated than it may seem is that in retrospect, I would say that he made a lot of important steps toward accommodating the demands of the black community. But they weren't enough. And then when you you match, for example, I, I have, I have a listing which I, you know, could share with you and I, I hate to give you a commercial because you've read more dissertations than I will ever read in my life or even think about but in my dissertation,

K

Ken Jackson 25:43

I saw your dissertation a long time ago, I would love to have a copy I think it was Charlie [unintelligible] or something. But you know I haven't seen a copy I would be delighted to borrow a copy.

R

Robert Curvin 25:55

Okay, I can make a copy available to you. In fact, I have it on disc now so I can even get Ken to download a disc for us. But anyway, I have a point where I talk about this question, and the in the dissertation, and I have a well, the prior point is that clearly Addonizio would not have won the election in 1962 without the Black community without Black support, and even CORE to the extent that we could support anybody we were out there working for his election against Leo Carlin, the prior mayor. But when it came time to deliver to the Black community, for its support, when you match what the Black community got against what he gave to representatives of the Italian American community, there's absolutely no comparison. I mean, Blacks in fact, Blacks were given jobs with much less power. I mean, you know, the, somebody became the chairman of the board of education. And somebody became the secretary of Board of education was a big deal, right? Or was that a different big deal?

P

Pat Curvin 27:24

Different big deal.

R

Robert Curvin 27:24

But it wasn't, it wasn't like running the board of education. And it wasn't like running the police department. And it was not like running the public works department and son on. So all of those jobs of running things went to Italian Americans. And I don't, you know, I don't have all the figures in my head but if you look at this comparison, you'll see that he clearly favored his constituency. But he didn't do all that much for the black community. The other thing I would point out, is that there was this.

K

Ken Jackson 28:01

He was reelected in 66?

R

Robert Curvin 28:03

He was reelected in 66. And that's an important point that he still was able to, to get support in most of the black community, partly because even those minimal, somewhat token jobs, the he appointed the first black magistrate, things of that kind, they, they made a big difference to many Blacks in the community. But the other thing I wanted to point out is, though, that he still had the NAACP, and the old line politicians very much in his corner. And they were not only uncomfortable with the emergence and the presence of groups like CORE, they were outspoken critics of CORE. Irvine Turner, the first Black elected official in Newark was aggressively opposed to the introduction of demonstrations and civil rights activities under (unintelligible) groups like CORE. He issued a press statement one week, publicly announcing that he had considered the work of the groups like CORE and has decided that Robert Curvin, the leader of CORE, is irresponsible. And the Newark Evening News published this on the front page of a

Sunday edition. And when I then further went to the News and complained and said you know, "You didn't all me, give me a chance to answer." About two weeks later in the middle of the week, on page 58, they had a little line that says CORE leader objects to being criticized as irresponsible by Irvine Turner, but it was not only Turner, but it was a whole range of these Larrie Stalks and, uh, Calvin West who became a councilman under the Addonizio regime was part of the Addonizio camp, that the leaders of the NAACP even during that period of time, I went to an NAACP meeting once to hopefully I think I was even invited to come to tell them what our plans were for the summer, we were trying to mount a summer project working in neighborhoods, and working with kids and so I went to the meeting. And I walk in and the meeting is in session, and one of the NAACP, NAACP officials gets up and says to the President, "Mr. President, I just see , just saw Robert Curvin enter into the room. I think we should ask him to leave." And the president of the NAACP, who then was a Newark police detective says to me, "Bob, sorry, but we're gonna have to ask you to leave the meeting." And so I got up and I walked out, and I left. But that's the kind of, of tension and actually it was both a you know, it was the old line versus the newcomers. But it was it was also somewhat of a class distinction. You know, we were young college graduates and, and, you know, really identified with the new thinking about civil rights and rights and all of that, and they represented the, the old line, you know, people who basically felt that it was okay to go slow. You don't you don't upset things. You don't publicly display your anger, and your discontent about the way things work. It sounds very much like an old South story. But it's really the old south up north. And that's the way it was.

L

Lisa Keller 32:23

I take it that SNCC made no inroads in Newark?

R

Robert Curvin 32:26

SNCC was here. I mean, virtually nil. Yeah, virtually nil. At one point a former SDS or SDServ formed in a Newark SNCC chapter. But

K

Ken Jackson 32:42

That was Clinton Hill?

R

Robert Curvin 32:43

Out of Clinton Hill but I can't-

L

Lisa Keller 32:46

It wasn't really a major player in the South (?).

R

Robert Curvin 32:48

R Robert Curvin 32:48
Not at all. Truly, not at all.

L Lisa Keller 32:50
Because across the river in New Rochelle, where I was at school with Whitney Young's kids. And we were the white kids were recruited in SNCC. Which is very ironic. That this is what's going on. So the CORE is the are the radicals in this battle?

R Robert Curvin 32:50
Well, yeah, I mean, we were, you know, at the same time, we, as I said, you know, we were, we were radicals who kept our day job. And a very, again, very often under great pressure,

K Ken Jackson 33:26
Were thee incidents before the arrest of the taxi driver Smith, that might have led to or that could have triggered a riot? Did you see the riots in 67 coming? How did you happen to wind up at the precinct?

R Robert Curvin 33:46
At the precinct? Yeah, well the first question did I see the riots coming I, you know, sure. I mean, I think that we were all very conscious that there could be a explosion. And I saw the anger that existed in the community. As I said, I was part of a lot of demonstrations. And when we were confronting the city over two very major issues that I think led up to the riots, one being the appointment of a secretary to the Board of Education. And then the other being the medical school. There were a lot of meetings downtown at city hall that were very chaotic

K Ken Jackson 34:48
And Addonizio and all stonewalled on both of those?

R Robert Curvin 34:51
Yeah, uh, he again, I think

K Ken Jackson 34:54
Does he charg-, is he in charge the Board of Education I'm trying to, was that his appointment?

R Robert Curvin 34:58

R Robert Curvin 34:58
He he appointed the The Board of Education and, and clearly had the strength to determine. Or I think the authority actually appointed the chairman as well,

P Pat Curvin 35:16
Yeah, everything it didn't become elected till much later

L Lisa Keller 35:18
What was the medical school issue?

R Robert Curvin 35:20
The medical school issue was at some point, the state of New Jersey decided to build a new medical school. And the leaders of this new venture, initially said that they would like to build it up in Madison on some large, private estate that could be turned over to the, to the government for this purpose. And people in the city of Newark said, "Why build a medical school out in Madison, the city of Newark needs that kind of development, it would also be close to the population that is most in need of better and improved medical services." And it has been alleged, and it's not hard to speculate that Addonizio saw the opportunity for lots of concrete to be poured, and lots of construction jobs, and contracts to be let, thereby giving him an opportunity to further the the

K Ken Jackson 36:34
and even more than patronage

R Robert Curvin 36:35
more than patronage some major, uh,

K Ken Jackson 36:38
Did I ever ask you whether you thought on balance looking back over 30 years? You can replay it, that they should never have built it? Was the medical school a good thing for Newark considering how big it is? Or now I know, they could have done it differently, we can argue about that. But I mean, would have been better if they put it in, built it in Madison or is it-

R Robert Curvin 37:03
Well, I, I it was it's kind of a it's a hard question to answer. But I on balance, I would say that the medical school has been a good thing.

K Ken Jackson 37:17
It's had it's own corrupt issues.

R Robert Curvin 37:18
Those documents that sit over there, by the way, those are all the transcripts of the negotiations between the community representatives and the state, over how the medical school would actually be built. The fact that those engagement negotiations took place was really one of the major results of the riot. In fact, after the rebellion, the federal government wrote to the city to the state of New Jersey, and said we will provide support for the construction of the medical school under these conditions. Condition one, you have to reach accommodation with representatives of the community regarding their issues of relocation, size of the site. As you probably know, Lisa, you probably haven't heard this, but in order to get the state to give up on building the medical school in Madison, the state said, well, we can't build it in Newark because we need so much land we need about 150 acres in order to build a medical school. And the representative of the city said without even thinking we'll give you 150 acres in the middle of-. Now 150 acres would have displaced about 10% of the total population of the city.

L Lisa Keller 38:58
The racial issue was displacement.

R Robert Curvin 39:00
Yeah.

L Lisa Keller 39:01
But I don't know this. I'm listening to this narrative from the outside and I'm not making all the connections. So that's why I have to make the connection. When you make the story up to indicate it was displacement because this has happened in a number of places it happened in White Plains too, (unintelligible) in White Plains the same issue of displacement came up with urban renewal. Where they removed the entire Black population from the city center.

R Robert Curvin 39:22
Right. It's been it's an issue that was present all over urban communities with the building of high ris-

L Lisa Keller 39:30



Lisa Keller 39:30

But they didn't riot in White Plains? That's the difference.



Robert Curvin 39:31

Right, right. Well, they don't riot in White Plains or they don't rebel as we say it was a rebellion.



Lisa Keller 39:39

Rebellion. That's a good point.



Robert Curvin 39:41

Yeah. And why do we call it a rebellion? I'll tell you later. But in any event, the city had offered 150 acres, which would displace a very large segment of the population, but more interestingly than just the numbers of the displaced. In our view, that is the leaders and activists of the African American community, we thought that this kind of displacement would have diminished the political power of the Black community, and therefore enabled Addonizio to be reelected in 1970. And we also thought, even more perniciously that he intentionally he knew that, that in offering in offering to, to, to provide that kind of land, he understood that the massive dislocation of that many people would have to render a large number of people powerless, because they would be moving, they would probably lose their registration status and so on. And, and it would also be a huge distraction from the effort to politically organized for the election.



Lisa Keller 41:05

There was no there were no plans for replacing or new housing. What about federal housing at this point, there was a lot of schemes for federal housing projects, there was that was nothing to do with anything? (unintelligible)



Robert Curvin 41:20

Well, there it at the time of the rebellion, and shortly after, as is evidenced in those hearings, which I actually was a part of, but I had totally forgotten I just reread them over the last month. It is absolutely shocking how unprepared the city was. And Danzig by the way, Lou Danzig, who was the head of the Housing Authority is a major player and he's here. And he he, he's asked questions very specifically. Okay, how much housing do you have? (Bye sweetheart, break). Housing, relocation specific services to the community training of medical and particularly doctors as well as non professional employees and a plan to assure that minorities participated in the construction of the medical school. These agreements were, in many ways historic. And they certainly would not have been achieved without the rebellion.



Lisa Keller 42:57

L Lisa Keller 42:57

What year is this?

R Robert Curvin 42:59

Well, the the rebellion occurred in 1967. The the negotiations began in January, I believe, or December of 1967. And they went through to March they ended in March. The agreements were

L Lisa Keller 43:19

So it was like early 68.

R Robert Curvin 43:21

Yeah, in 68. Right. The other thing I would say is that Tim and I, by the way, we just did an interview last week with Gustav Henningburg. I don't know if you know, Gus, but Gus tells the wonderful story about how the urban coalition was organized in Newark became new, called the greater Newark Urban coalition as a result of the rebellion, that the the head of the Prudential insurance company, a man by the name of Donald McNaughton at the time, and the provost of Rutgers Newark University, and Jim Pauley, the head of the Urban League, here in Essex County. All contacted him shortly after the rebellion and said, you know, we're going to form an Urban core Coalition, which had already chapter had already been formed in New York, and we're going to set up a system where we can get we could, as he said, they told you know, we want we want to fix Newark. I don't know exactly what that means, but I think in its implementation it meant to really try to make some things happen to improve the condition for African Americans and minorities in the city and Gus, over the years, had through the first through the urban coalition, and then through his work as a private entrepreneur has been the the critical force, in shaping and managing plans to provide opportunities and apprenticeships on construction jobs for minorities, beginning with the medical school, but also working through even projects that have occurred as recently as the arena, the new sports arena in downtown Newark, which we'll drive by and take a look at

K Ken Jackson 45:49

What's his story? Before he started doing the work where what was he representing (unintelligible)

R Robert Curvin 45:55

Gus, Gus was working for the Legal Defense Fund at the time. He's a very, very smart guy who, for a number of years, ran a an interview program on NBC television called Positively Black. And which is kind of like a Gil Noble type of thing. You know, that week by week, there were different interviews with people about things that were happening in politics and civic life regarding the African American community. He, he's also at this point, a very happy, grandpa,

but he's the son of a man who at one time, was the president of one of the historically black colleges, I think, maybe Tougaloo. And has a very interesting narrative about the things that happened post 1967.

K

Ken Jackson 47:13

Let me just ask you about the riot now. Well, you so you found out about the right, pretty soon. Well, it wasn't a riot. Somebody had been arrested? Why did they get you down? I mean, all of this somebody's arrested a taxi driver. Is that news in Newark? That's not news. But [unintelligance]

R

Robert Curvin 47:28

No, well what was what was happening was that a crowd was emerging, because the precinct den? was just literally, across the street, from the Hayes Homes project, one of these massive housing projects that had you know, over 1000 families and all of them poor. And they were all congregating in front of the precinct. So somebody called me some woman called me at my home. And I was sitting in the kitchen, in the South Ward of Newark and pick up the phone and someone says, you know, "Bob, you got to get over here right away. A man has been beaten. And there's a big crowd forming and there's going to be trouble. You got to get here right away." So I jump in the car and drove over.

K

Ken Jackson 48:21

You were able to drive to the, near the, precinct?

R

Robert Curvin 48:24

Oh, yeah, I parked right around the corner from the precinct I would literally was actually on the-

K

Ken Jackson 48:29

And as you walked up there's already a crowd?

R

Robert Curvin 48:31

There's already crowd there

K

Ken Jackson 48:32

And you were you had been active enough so that people recognized you?

R

Robert Curvin 48:36

A lot of people, not everybody. But I walked I at that point, people said to me, guy has been killed. He's he's dead. You know. I said, Well, let me let me find out what's going on. So I walked into the precinct.

K

Ken Jackson 48:51

So nobody asked you, you just said, I'm Bob Curvin, or I'm head of CORE or whatever.

R

Robert Curvin 48:56

Yeah, I walked into the precinct and I said, I'm Bob Curvin.

K

Ken Jackson 48:59

And at the time you were by yourself?

R

Robert Curvin 49:01

I was by myself. And the I think it was a lieutenant at the desk, who said to me, you can't see the prisoner. And just at that moment, an inspector named Melchior was walking in the back door of the precinct, and he recognized me, and he said, Wait a minute, and he comes up to the desk. And he says, I'll take him back to see the prisoner. And we walked back. A short distance.

K

Ken Jackson 49:33

You were the first person.

R

Robert Curvin 49:34

I was the first person, first person from the community. There was no one else in the precinct, believe me. I've heard all kinds of reinterpretations and revisions of this history, but I was the only person there and

K

Ken Jackson 49:48

because I put it down that you were part of a delegation.



R

Robert Curvin 49:51

I well. This is what happened in the best of my memory. I I talked to the man the

K

Ken Jackson 50:00

He was a little? Skinny? Was this Smith was skinny?

R

Robert Curvin 50:06

Yeah he was a slight guy he was and he was clearly injured. He, you know, was moaning he was talking about his pain about being hit in the head said his ribs were, his side was hurting. And I said to the inspector Melcher, you know, he's got to get to a hospital. And he said, we'll get we've got an ambulance on the way, we'll get him out of here. And then we walked back out into the lobby of the precinct and (unintelligable). And at that time, there had already been other community representatives were there, including Tim Still, and I think they kind of trickled in. But Oliver Lofton eventually appeared Don Wendell from who was also from the New Community Corporation. And we sort of convened

K

Ken Jackson 51:08

crowd is still thinks he's dead?

R

Robert Curvin 51:10

The crowd is still out there. And then so the the question was, then, you know, well, what happened? And I said to the group, I saw him, he's going to the hospital, what not. It may have been that somebody else walked back to see him after that. I don't know. But maybe that's Well the crowds still gonna be angry-he's gotta go to the hospital (unintelligable).

K

Ken Jackson 51:39

Right-

R

Robert Curvin 51:40

Exactly right. So anyway, Inspector Melchior says to us, somebody's got to go out there and tell them to go home. And I said, They're not gonna go home, you know, obviously, they're not going to go home. And we talked a little bit about what we possibly could do. And everyone agreed, that the only thing that we could possibly do to prevent a very serious disturbance from occurring, was to try to convince the group to organize itself and march somewhere and and try to, you know, get it into some kind of formation. And I won't speculate as to why I was the one assigned to do it. But everyone said, Well, Bob, you know, you go out there and talk to them and so on. And I-

K Ken Jackson 52:36
And they listened?

R Robert Curvin 52:38
And I went initially, I would say, about a third of the crowd began to organize a lineup.

K Ken Jackson 52:49
And they listened for, you gave your spiel.

R Robert Curvin 52:51
Oh, yeah, they listen to they listened.

K Ken Jackson 52:54
(Unintelligable)

R Robert Curvin 52:54
No, nobody, nobody said Get off the car. Nobody said, you know, but they listened.

K Ken Jackson 53:01
Were you on a car?

R Robert Curvin 53:02
I was on top of a car. And that's the picture that's in the Kerner report of me and the car. And but it's not the initial situation, because what happened was that, as I was speaking, someone's a few people started throwing rocks. And the police were standing behind me. And they were throwing rocks at the police. And so as soon as the rocks began to fly, the police retreated. I jumped off the car, and we went back into the precinct. And the police did then began putting on their riot gear. And again, the community

K Ken Jackson 53:50
This third of the mob that's formed into a-

R

Robert Curvin 53:53

They're they're, they're they're, they're going back into the crowd

K

Ken Jackson 53:57

You know they're going back [unintelligible]

R

Robert Curvin 53:57

No they're not waiting to march or anything like that. So

K

Ken Jackson 54:03

Were you were you planning to lead the march to City Hall or something?

R

Robert Curvin 54:06

We were going to march downtown to City Hall. That was that that was my idea. But anyway, the police didn't want us to go out. And as they said, we we're gonna go out and control the crowd and we knew what that meant. So we said, let's try again, let's see if we can do this. Again. We made a little bit of effort to get people lined up. So at that point, Inspector Melcher gave me a bullhorn. And that's the picture I have a bullhorn in the picture in the Kerner report, again, speaking to the crowd, and I spoke to them in very frank, direct harsh terms and terms that in fact, some police officers accused me of instigating the riot because I said, you know, look, the police are at war with us. And but we can't win, that the only thing that we can do is to peacefully demonstrate and show our discontent and organize politically. So let's get ourselves together, avoid the injury. And at that point, then someone threw a Molotov cocktail. And then there was another one against and the flame started trickling down the side of the building. And the police then in their riot gear waded into the crowd, and started swinging and, and, you know, grabbing people and hitting people, and I ran around the corner, jumped in my car, and went home. Now, when I got back to the house, Tom Hayden was at the house, because, in fact, when I had left the first time, his girlfriend at that moment, his incumbent girlfriend, as I say, we won't put that on the tape. This is this is a story for whatever reason Tom has not chosen to, to reveal. But I got back to the house. And I explained to Pat, Connie (Constance Brown, Tom's girlfriend re: Inside Newark), and Tom what had happened. And Tom says, we'll let's ride over there and see what's going on.

K

Ken Jackson 56:31

He would have wanted the riot, is that what you're saying more or less? Would have been what they were trying to do anyway now its happened (unintelligible).

R Robert Curvin 56:39
I think that's right.

L Lisa Keller 56:41
Why was he at your house? Why was he at your house?

R Robert Curvin 56:46
Well, we were friends.

L Lisa Keller 56:49
I mean, it was just coincidental. He was at- just a coincidence.

R Robert Curvin 56:52
He was out of town during the day. And he knew that his girlfriend was going to be at my house that evening. So he was coming by to pick her up. Yeah, it was just a coincidence. Well he's been, you know, he had been at my house many times. And and we

K Ken Jackson 57:12
Did you talk to him when he came back to Newark for this interview, or whatever? He didn't try to contact - had you had contact with him over the last, what was it, 40 years?

R Robert Curvin 57:24
On a couple of occasions, but not, not about this, and not in any serious way. But anyway, Tom, Pat, Tom, Connie, and my five year old son, we get into car and we drive over toward the Fourth Precinct. And as we get into,

K Ken Jackson 57:52
Back to the scene of the crime?

R Robert Curvin 57:54
Back to the scene, yeah, as we, as we get into Bergen Street. It is in total chaos. There are guys running up and down the street. There are people are throwing things around. And it's

looks like to me that they were using beer cans as missiles in our car, sort of suddenly shorter runs right into this area. But we stop because there's so many people running around in the street we can't drive through. And then these guys approach our car. And they see Tom sitting in the back. They don't know who he is. He's just the white guy. And they see Connie a white woman. And they say there's a white, you know, somebody yelled, "There are white people in here!" And they start, you know, moving towards the car and uh, putting their hands on the car. And at that point, I opened the door, I stopped the car, I got out of the car. And I said, Wait a minute, you know, I've got my child in this car, you know, we're gonna turn around, and we're gonna get out of here, but you guys have to back off. And they did. And I got in the car turned around and went back to the house. And then the next morning, you know, I went to this meeting that Addonizio had.

K

Ken Jackson 59:23

Because it on the news that night?

R

Robert Curvin 59:24

Oh, yeah. Oh, it was on the news so quickly. That when I left the precinct the first time and headed back to the house. My radio station in the car was on CBS. And there was a break in and on CBS that said violence has erupted in the city of Newarrk at a in the Central Ward over the beating of a taxi cab driver and apparently there are, you know, people are breaking into stores and the police have arrested a number of people and so on. And so there was the first that was that was the first electronic announcement that I heard in it, but it was it was literally within minutes of my leaving, the precient

L

Lisa Keller 1:00:26

Was Hayden shaken up from the car incident?

R

Robert Curvin 1:00:30

You know, he's never-

K

Ken Jackson 1:00:31

He felt that he said you saved his life? (Not sure, unintelligable)

R

Robert Curvin 1:00:33

Well, you know, he's never he's never it's kind of interesting. He d- he didn't mention certainly did not mention it in the in the, he didn't mention it in the the New York Review of Books article that he wrote. But there are a lot of other things he didn't mention. The reality is, is that, you know, Tom, who I think is a brilliant person, and certainly a a terrific writer, and much of the

kind of organization, and organizing that they did in the south ward of Newark, I fully support it. And in fact, in some of the, the efforts in December, there were demonstrations, I was right there with them. One of their more prominent demonstrations that is mentioned in the film, and that they've talked about in their history about demonstrating against the stores that were cheating black customers. I was on the picket line when they finally decided to act against the store and was arrested with them. So we were we were very close friends, in a way. But we've also had different ideas and attitudes. My own view is that we in CORE [break] this film about Newark where this guy from outside for three years as smart as he was, and as courageous as he was certainly about a lot of things. He was he was a bit player. And they only organized in the South Ward of Newark, we worked all over the state, but you know, essentially in Newark, and in Essex County. And this I feel that unfortunately, the woman who was the filmmaker did not understand even the value of the history because she had never made a documentary before. You know, most of her her in fact all of her experience-

K

Ken Jackson 1:03:00

I don't even know what- (unintelligible)

R

Robert Curvin 1:03:02

-is in commercial film. And so when she went to fundraisers and she says, I got Ken Jackson to give me an interview, and I've got Clem price. They never even asked her what are your credentials?

L

Lisa Keller 1:03:13

Says you were interviewed for this.

R

Robert Curvin 1:03:15

Yeah, he has he has a wonderful

L

Lisa Keller 1:03:17

When did this come out?

R

Robert Curvin 1:03:17

He has a wonderful and Clem Price's contribution in fact that I wrote,

L

Lisa Keller 1:03:22

I love Clem. Clem was our (unintelligible) he was wonderful.

R Robert Curvin 1:03:24
I wrote a review of this, that I'll share with you in which I said that.

K Ken Jackson 1:03:28
You need to remind me if you take me home, I've got the film.

L Lisa Keller 1:03:32
I'd like to see it. I don't like to I have to see it now. Yeah I've gotta see it now. I'd like to hear Clem's version of this also.

R Robert Curvin 1:03:43
Yeah, well, Clem, Clem. I've talked to Clem a lot about this. And I think on one hand, Clem is somewhat embarrassed that he put so much effort into help- helping this woman get support,

L Lisa Keller 1:03:58
What's the name of the filmmaker?

R Robert Curvin 1:04:00
It's called Revolution 67.

L Lisa Keller 1:04:02
The woman.

K Ken Jackson 1:04:03
I've never met her before. And I don't even remember where I was interviewed or even when

L Lisa Keller 1:04:06
But you know, what's interesting. I mean, to interrupt you, but it's, it's beginning to sound like, and I don't mean to demean Hayden, but that this is part of the kind of, he's acting as kind of the white sort of radical movement of this era looking for causes and he took this cause on, but

this was very typical of a lot of people at this in this era.

R

Robert Curvin 1:04:31

Well, I think it's a little more complicated than that, because actually, Ken you advised this fellow that did this dissertation on NCUP at Teacher's college.

K

Ken Jackson 1:04:44

That's, we're thinking about, uh Gerwin? Randy Gerwin.

R

Robert Curvin 1:04:49

Gerwin yeah. And if you read that dissertation, which I don't think is a particularly strong dissertation, albeit-

K

Ken Jackson 1:04:58

Well I'll always listen he was a radical. I remember thinking, Yeah, you know, you sure you know the here's a bunch of white people go into a Newark neighborhood. But he was he was that's where that's the world he was coming from too.

R

Robert Curvin 1:05:09

Right. Yeah. He wrote his dissertation on? on on the SDS group in Newark and it's all about how they got

L

Lisa Keller 1:05:19

Oh so Hayden was actually in SDS?

R

Robert Curvin 1:05:21

Hayden was a leader of SDS.

L

Lisa Keller 1:05:23

So it's SDS that was, I didn't know, now these all little bits are beginning to make sense.

K

Ken Jackson 1:05:29

They were going to try to unite, this is what their theory was, unite the white working class with the Blacks and lead lead us to a new world .

L

Lisa Keller 1:05:38

I know SDS. Alright, okay. I'm a child and this you know coming of age.

R

Robert Curvin 1:05:42

The dissertation was very enlightening, in several respects, because I didn't realize how grandiose the initial vision was

L

Lisa Keller 1:05:52

Oh yes very grandiose,

R

Robert Curvin 1:05:53

It was absolutely unbelievable.

L

Lisa Keller 1:05:54

The world was gonna be taken over yeah.

R

Robert Curvin 1:05:56

And I'm sure anybody today who looks back and say, they thought that they were going to come in to Newark and with this combination of, of upper middle class, alienated trust fund babies, and disenchanted you know, college students, and a few really sharp intellectuals like Tom and Carl Wittenberg and a few others and, and create a massive movement to begin to change the politics of American society. You s- you sort of shake your head, and because in terms of what really happened was that they worked in a 20 block area of the Clinton Hill neighborhood Council of the Clinton Hill area. They initially came in to work with the Clinton Hill neighborhood Council, which turned out to them a great disappointment, because the Clinton Hill neighborhood Council was mainly homeowners, and they were they you know, "We're not going to work with homeowners were looking to work with poor people."

K

Ken Jackson 1:07:03

He was the guy winter winters,

R

Robert Curvin 1:07:04

Stanley winters a historian, who he started.

K

Ken Jackson 1:07:09

He worked with them at first-

R

Robert Curvin 1:07:10

Well, he was he was he and Stanley Aronowitz. put together the group that included me, that invited them to Newark, they had to have some evidence of an invitation from local people. And we were all, you know, sort of brought together with people from Americans for Democratic Action, CORE, the Clinton Hill neighborhood council, well, after they were here for about two months, they had this incredible fight with the Clinton Hill neighborhood council. And virtually, in the words of Stanley Winters, he feels that they basically destroyed the Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council. And they kind of moved away, move further down the hill to work with the poorest of the poor. And they did, and they produced some really interesting leaders out of that community. They took over the anti poverty program in the neighborhood. They ran a block program, where ironically, they ended up working with the Police Athletic League. And, and that's what they did. But again, in terms of the major issues that were not involved. The medical school, I mean, one of the key people now, in fact, the key person on the medical school site, from the community's point of view, was a an African American named Junius Williams, who had come here initially with SDS, but had left them because he felt uncomfortable working with an essentially white group and formed his own thing called the Newark Area Planning Association. So to that, to that extent, they can take credit for maybe inviting Junius to Newark, but certainly they were not involved and central to even the the effort that he put together

K

Ken Jackson 1:09:12

Junius became a developer didn't he?

R

Robert Curvin 1:09:15

Junius Junius went to work for Ken Gibson after his election, then he later became a developer of housing for a short while he, I don't think he was very successful at it, frankly, but I'm not sure.

K

Ken Jackson 1:09:27

I remember having a conversation with him about the Laurel, Mount Laurel decision

R

Robert Curvin 1:09:33

Mount Laurel

K

Ken Jackson 1:09:34

About Princeton, and I was saying, you know, isn't that unfair that Princeton's kind of ducking out of the deal, he says, Yeah but I'm getting money from Princeton, I don't know if it was actually from Princeton that we otherwise wouldn't have had. So it's, as you would say, it's more complicated.

R

Robert Curvin 1:09:47

That's right.

K

Ken Jackson 1:09:48

You know, depends on what (unintelligible) I got money I wouldn't otherwise have had. Yeah so, it's their guilt money but okay.

R

Robert Curvin 1:09:55

But I call that New Jersey apartheid. because that's the way they handled the Mount Laurel decision they said We'll actually pay you guys to build more housing as long as you keep those low income people and minorities in the urban areas, then we don't have to carry out the Mount Laurel decision. Isn't that something?

L

Lisa Keller 1:10:19

My husband was the architect for the Yonkers desegregation.

R

Robert Curvin 1:10:22

Oh, really?

K

Ken Jackson 1:10:24

That's all any of us (?) how did you get invited to Addonizio's office the next day? In other words, that must really be ad hoc. In other words, do they call, does Addonizio's office call you up? What happens?

R

Robert Curvin 1:10:36

I think that uh a guy named Jim Tracy who was the head of the Human Rights Commission at

I think that uh, a guy named Jim Tree, who was the head of the Human Rights Commission at the time, yeah, he he called me up. And now the other thing is that he later called me up and said, "Bob, I have to tell you that the word around City Hall is that the police have a list of people that they're looking for. And you're on the list. So, you know, you better be careful." And and at that point, Pat, my wife and I, in my child, we packed up and went to Union, not far from here. And bunked with my brother's family

K

Ken Jackson 1:11:21

Was that that same night or the night after?

R

Robert Curvin 1:11:23

That was the second night

K

Ken Jackson 1:11:25

When the riot really hit. But so you went down and you talked to Addonizio. And at least the official story, (unintelligible) so we have some broken glass and stuff like that, it's not a big deal.

R

Robert Curvin 1:11:37

Right, he uh, yeah.

K

Ken Jackson 1:11:40

Is that what he said?

R

Robert Curvin 1:11:41

That's basically what the position he took. Let's not overreact to this. This was unfortunate. He agreed that he would appoint a police, a Black police captain. And, and but generally, his, his attitude was, was, you know, this is not, this is not what's going on in all of these other cities around the country, this is a pretty much contained situation. Now this is what is interesting about this, because the second night, and I was not there,

K

Ken Jackson 1:12:34

but there were leaflets going around and said there was gonna be a demonstration on the second night.

R

Robert Curvin 1:12:37

Yeah, now, the leaflets were were mainly as far as I can tell, they were produced by the NCUP, SDS, people. And the demonstration and so at- Did any of those leaflets survive? This is this is a historic an archivist question? No, no, no, it's a very good question. But I do have I do have some of the the newsletters from actually an earlier period where that may help to shine some light on this point you made about Tom having having a very different view about whether or not a riot was a good thing. Because in 1966 there was an incident or a time when a whole bunch of leaflets were distributed in the public housing project in the Central Ward that showed how to make a Molotov cocktail. This was in 1966. So there's a the police, apparently, you know, immediately suspected that this was coming from NCUP.

K

Ken Jackson 1:14:08

Well you know, I can imagine because I'm gonna think I know what a Molotov cocktail is. But if you told me to go through one against your house. I don't think it's got somebody with a rag and a bottle of gasoline and masks but I'm sure I'd kill myself before I'd kill anybody with it, so somebody's gotta show you

R

Robert Curvin 1:14:29

Right. Exactly. And it's, you know, it's it's a very simple, it's the most base technology that is imaginable but nobody would know

K

Ken Jackson 1:14:43

(unintelligible). That's what I'm worried about. Well isn't that clever? Whoops.

R

Robert Curvin 1:14:45

No, well, you know, it doesn't happen until you light it. Yeah. But the point was, is that there was this incident. And if you remember, the cover of The New York Review of Books piece actually showed the actual construction of a Molotov cocktail. But anyway, there's a newsletter that responds to the police accusation of SDS, one of the NCUP newsletters that says, you know, they think that people are stupid, they don't know how to make Molotov cocktails, etc. And they just want to blame us and etc. But anyway, I have I have lots of interesting stuff from that period, like that. Did you see the leaflet? Did you? Have you ever seen one of the leaflets? That were-

L

Lisa Keller 1:15:37

Allegedly that night.

R

Robert Curvin 1:15:40

I don't recall. I don't recall. But I what I what I do know, though, is that a group of people showed up there and, and they in turn, bought(brought) out again, the residents and the people in the area to create another scene. And, and then one of the demonstrators, one of the picketers is as is caught on film, walking up to the precinct and taking a club and banging out the basement window of the precinct. Now, again, back to the Bongiorno film, that incident and that demonstration is placed in the film as though it were the first night of the rebellion. So the historical accuracy of that is totally incorrect.

L

Lisa Keller 1:16:46

And it actually occurred the second day.

R

Robert Curvin 1:16:48

It actually occurred the second night second night. Yeah, it was not did not happen in the first night (unintelligible) second night,

K

Ken Jackson 1:17:03

Did you stay awake? Because then by the second night, that's when the that's when all hell breaks loose. Really? I suppose.

R

Robert Curvin 1:17:10

That's right. Yeah.

K

Ken Jackson 1:17:11

First the state police and the National Guard-

R

Robert Curvin 1:17:13

Tight. And then it's after the second night-

K

Ken Jackson 1:17:15

He's (?) actually put your son at risk to get the car as we know from retrospect, right.

R

Robert Curvin 1:17:19

Yeah.

K

Ken Jackson 1:17:21

Do you know any of the families who'd (driven into unintelligable)? What happened to them? Where any of them killed?

R

Robert Curvin 1:17:27

Well, the Spellman family apparently, they are still around the daughters children. This is the woman who had many, many, something like 13 kids or 11 kids, and she was shot just standing by one of her windows. Yeah. And I don't know. And I've never, you know, made an effort to track down the families but I know that the daughter of the Spelman daughter is around and she in fact appears in the Revolution 67 film. But, uh, as you know, on the, I guess, the, the fifth night of the rebellion, about, I don't know, it could be one, two o'clock in the morning. I got a call from an assistant to the governor, saying that the governor wants to meet with me. And that a the state police would be at my brother's house, in, you know, X number of minutes to pick me up and take me to meet with the governor.

K

Ken Jackson 1:18:54

In Trenton?

R

Robert Curvin 1:18:55

No in Newark, and as soon as the police, the state police officer gets out of the car, I walk out anyway. And Pat walks out with me. And she goes up to the drivers and asked their badge numbers and writes down the license plate number. Well, well, she she has been reading some history. So I'm, you know, whisked off to the to the US Attorney's Office and I get there. And Tom Hayden is there. And Paul Ylvisacker who was the commissioner of Community Affairs and had been a vice president previously at the Ford Foundation, and was a very interesting adviser to the governor on cities and development and minority issues and so on. And the the, I believe the superintendent of the State Police was there and David Sachs, who was then the US Attorney for the jurisdiction here. And Governor Hughes sits down and he thanks us for coming. And he said that he had asked us to, to come because he had been told that we were two people in the community who would be straight with him, and give them the facts and tell him you know, what we really thought was, was going on. And my guess, knowing Paul Ylvisacker well, much better than I knew the governor was that this was what Paul had suggested, and what he had told him. And within a few minutes, it was Tom, who initially said to the governor, that, as far as you know, what's going on out there, there's no, there's no longer a riot, it's over in the community, but there is a counter riot by the police. And unless you get them out of the community that this is going to go on, there's going to be continual sniping and firing back and forth, mainly, you know, by the police. So I said, you know, essentially the same thing, and that I certainly felt that that was the case. And the governor then says something like, you know, I don't know how I can do that. The, you know, the world is watching us. And if somebody if I remove the security forces, and then somebody is, is killed after that,

K

Ken Jackson 1:21:55

(Unintelligible)

R

Robert Curvin 1:21:56

Yeah, yeah. So he said, that's, that's, that's very gonna be very hard to do. And then at this point, Ylvisacker, his commissioner says, "Well, Governor, I don't think we have any other choice." He says, you know, "we haven't, what else could we do?" He says, so he said, "Why don't we? Why don't we try it. And if it doesn't work, we'll bring the security forces back in." And he talked a little bit about (a little?) and finally the governor said uh, Okay, he said, Let's do it. Let's, let's get him out. And he said, "Let's, let's think about, you know, leaving back some enough of a detail to, to keep communications going and things like that. But he said, you know, let's do it." And at that point, the meeting was pretty much over. He, he thanked us. He gave he gave Tom and me, one of his cards. And he wrote, you know, with thanks from Governor Hughes and he said, she said, if anybody stopped you once a bother you show them this card, the governor, which I thought was, you know, very, very kind, but I didn't think it would work. What I knew about the, the Newark Police as well as the others,

K

Ken Jackson 1:23:24

You raised it what, how would you rank these forces of freedom in order? Newark police, the state police, and the National Guard, just from your conversations with other people as to which if any of them would be favored by the Black community? Or they were they, you know, from the outside it looks like the state police were kind of the worst, but I don't know if that's the case or not.

R

Robert Curvin 1:23:50

I don't I don't know. I I I don't think I mean, my impression. And what I remember from the situation, also what I've read. I don't see how the state police come out to be the worse. Okay, because I mean, you you would know, I guess the question I would ask, even in terms of rounds fired, do they lead? I don't think so.

K

Ken Jackson 1:24:17

You're right. Of course there were many more National Guard.

R

Robert Curvin 1:24:20

Yeah, there were many more National Guard. But also, if you if you just take, for example, the one murder where or killing where even in a recent panel discussion, by the way former Governor Byrne, who was then the prosecutor in Essex County said, we couldn't get indictments from the grand jury for any one of these killings. We didn't have the evidence. He said but only in one case, you know, we we made, we probably could have gotten an

indictment. And that case, he's talking about the Rutledge case, the killing of a, of a young person named James Rutledge. And this killing according to several people who have affidavits from eyewitnesses, occurred in a storefront tavern, where the police went in and found this guy by himself, but did not realize that there were a couple of his friends who were hiding behind a partition and actually witnessed the police basically putting about 40-50 bullets in his body, including shooting him through the top of the head, as and all over his body.

K

Ken Jackson 1:26:03

And he was doing, he was what remind me this Rutledge?

R

Robert Curvin 1:26:06

He was just another guy.

K

Ken Jackson 1:26:08

He just happened to be there.

R

Robert Curvin 1:26:08

He just happened to be there. Yeah.

L

Lisa Keller 1:26:11

How'd the police justify it?

R

Robert Curvin 1:26:13

Well, this is this is the point, though, that I I have tried to make about this is that I think you have to, you have to look at this as a political situation, that if you you this is a grand jury. That's meeting shortly after a rebellion, where store owners have had their businesses destroyed. A policeman and a fireman have also been killed. The white community is in total fear. Not only within Newark, but through the the entire state. Under those circumstances, I don't think Brendan Byrne or the prosecutors, or even a grand jury had the courage to say this was an unjust killing, and therefore we should indict the police officer. They had the a- the names of the police officers. They had, they had eyewitness statements that by the way, were taken by legal service aides, uh, shortly after the rebellion was over. But they didn't do it. And and, you know, a lot of people just, you know, say, Well, gee, you know why? And Byrne says, you know, we didn't have the evidence to really nail these guys. They had the evidence, but they didn't have the they didn't have it's a grand jury is a political process. It's not just the legal, a legal process. And I think that's the reason why no one was indicted. Ron Parmabo wrote this book called uh, No Cause for Indictment which by the way, has been reissued over the last year. But he goes through each of these killings very carefully.

K Ken Jackson 1:26:14
They looted.

L Lisa Keller 1:28:30
Martial law had been declared correct?

R Robert Curvin 1:28:33
Oh, yeah.

L Lisa Keller 1:28:33
Yes. What at what point in martial law have been declared?

K Ken Jackson 1:28:41
Probably two o'clock in the morning (unintelligable)

R Robert Curvin 1:28:43
When they brought the Guard in-

L Lisa Keller 1:28:45
Addonizio ask the Guard to be called in.

R Robert Curvin 1:28:47
Yeah, yeah. Yeah. There's another interesting aspect of about this, by the way, that that I've never seen dealt with in by any, any of the writing about the rebellion. And that is what really was the message that was being given to the troops on the street by authorities. And to me, as I read through the Lilly(?) report, and newspaper (unintelligable), it seems to me that the message was a little confusing that it may be that at some point, the interpretation of the message whatever it was on the part of the police and the State Police and the Guard, was shoot to kill. Now, they all claim that that was not the case. But it sounds to me like Spina made this very kind of vague and confusing statement about, "I have instructed my men to use their weapons to defend themselves", or something, but it sounded to me like a, like an encouragement for them to, to shoot,

K

Ken Jackson 1:30:13

Do you remember when you first came back to Newark? I mean, I mean, as a not as not by the state police but just to drive or walk down Springfield Avenue

R

Robert Curvin 1:30:23

After the rebellion? I'm trying to think

K

Ken Jackson 1:30:31

And what your feelings were and so on?

R

Robert Curvin 1:30:33

That's an interesting question I never even thought of it. Well, it was likely within a day or two that I went back to my house. And we had an office on on West Market Street, you know, which has been obliterated by now by development there. But I was certainly back in the office within a day or so. In some respects, I think the destruction of Springfield Avenue, which was already well underway, even before the Rebellion has been overstated, but it certainly was more was more demolished. And, and lots of stores open, I'm riding through the the areas and seeing the stores that had with the windows broken. Many of them, by the way, had been as the evidence shows had been shot through by the by the police and the Guardsmen who were infuriated that some of the stores had signs in them saying "Soul Brother", or "Black owned business". And they and often often in those cases actually broke the windows of the stores themselves, and went into the stores and wrecked furniture and things like that. You're very careful in (unintelligible) Well I think it's really very important to get the the terminology correct, even though in my own mind as you as a social scientist will appreciate that, in an event like this is many things, that there are people out there that are rioting, that there are people out there that are actually trying to advocate some political cause or message. But in the final analysis, how we think about an incident like this, I think is very important from a policy point of view. And that if you call it a riot, the focus is on criminality and illegal behavior in someone. But if you call it a rebellion, you're putting the emphasis on the underlying grievances and issues that are being addressed. So while a riot and to me really calls for more control and enforcement, etc, a rebellion in my mind calls for a series of social political development, financial responses, that attempt to address the underlying causes of discontent, inequality, etc.

K

Ken Jackson 1:34:05

My comment is, is not meant to be facetious since it's more stupid than that, but by calling it a rebellion, and we know we're really just having an intellectual discussion forty years later. But it would seem to me that you would somehow justify a more heavy handed government response. Now there is a rebellion. Now the full force of the state is defending itself. It's not about somebody breaking a window, stealing a pair of sneakers. Now, it's an assault on the state. And these are the forces of the state. So now you've you've called them out. I'm just I'm

just thinking about it. I've never really thought about it. I've never thought- but then I wonder if it doesn't in some sense justify a heavier response. Because it's not about now whether the guy whether or not the guy was beaten up or not.

R

Robert Curvin 1:34:59

Are you talking about a heavier response in the future?

K

Ken Jackson 1:35:01

Government response, yeah, in a sense, if you're talking rebellion, now we're now now we're.

R

Robert Curvin 1:35:07

We have to protect ourselves.

K

Ken Jackson 1:35:09

If you're talking about you don't have enough jobs, or something (unintelligable) Well, you know, we can negotiate this point. Rebellion, we can't negotiate. just I'm just talking I don't know.

R

Robert Curvin 1:35:20

Yeah, but I make I'll make another distinction because this is this is great. I would make I think that your point would hold if we were calling it a revolution. And that's why I also would argue with Bongiorno for suggesting that it's a revolution.

K

Ken Jackson 1:35:39

Her movies called Revolution.

R

Robert Curvin 1:35:41

Her movie's called Revolution. Yeah, it was not a revolution. It was a rebellion. A rebellion, still, in my view, leaves in play the ordinary means of democratic society ultimately addressing its issues. And that is through the vote, as well as through lobbying and politics, and government action, and so on.

K

Ken Jackson 1:36:13

I accept your response.

R

Robert Curvin 1:36:16

You'll accept the response. Okay.

L

Lisa Keller 1:36:18

That's been my argument that every Riot has a justifiable cause behind it. Are you familiar with Kevin Mumford's book?

R

Robert Curvin 1:36:27

Yes I am certainly.

L

Lisa Keller 1:36:27

Cause Kevin came to the city seminar at Columbia, I'm the chair of, and he presented it. And we were discussing this issue of the causation of the riots. And I said, "But behind every riot is a justifiable cause." And he kind of like froze when I said that. He said, "No one ever says that. No one wants that. No one wants to admit that the riots may have the criminal elements in the front, but that there is a justifiable element that caused it to occur in the first place" particularly from the mid 60s to the early 70s, there was a particular heightened awareness of this.

R

Robert Curvin 1:37:07

Yeah. But see, you know, I, I, that's, I think that's an interesting response. But I, I would, I guess, I would argue a little about that. Because if you accept that, you could say that there oughta be a Riot all the time. Because there's always a grievance, and there's always high unemployment and there's always, you know, people living in intolerable conditions. But you don't have a Riot all the time. A riot in my view, or a rebellion and I again, I can see that, you know, in the case of Newark, there's some of both, but again, again the policy point to me is the important point, as a sociologist or a scholar, that I would want to make. But you take the New York City blackout, for example, where in 1977, where you had widespread violence throughout the city. Bruce Porter, do you know Bruce at all? Ken he's at the the Columbia School of Journalism? We did a we did a monograph actually, that actually turned into a book on the blackout. It's called Blackout Looting. But I again, I discussed this whole issue of, you know, what's, what's a riot, and what's a political response. And the only the only area of the city where we thought we could make the argument that there was simultaneously a political response to stick(?) long standing grievances and issues was in Bushwick in Brooklyn, and in the other areas, people were just taking advantage of the absence of control and power and breaking into stores and getting whatever they can. M- very frequently by the way led by people who were already very much part of the criminal leadership of the community. We we actually were able to get police data that showed the time at which every person was arrested, at least booked on the policeman's log. And we then went back and checked the police records of each of the people. And we found that the earlier you were arrested the more police, former

arrests you had. And it was really quite, quite fascinating. And so, you know, you say, well, could you really call that a rebellion? You know, yeah, maybe it was a rebellion against their, their whole life. But in the context of really trying to figure out whether or not this was really a political statement about the conditions of the poor community. So when we, we, I guess we punted in a way. But we said Bushwick, it was a different story, that, you know, as soon as the control was out they, and they formed, you know, spokespeople came forward and said, you know, like we've been ignored in Bushwick for for so long. And look (?) what's going on and there was also evidence of very rapid demographic changes going on in Bushwick that nobody was even paying attention to. So anyway, it's this is this is a very, very interesting, but almost endless discussion about about this, this this question

L

Lisa Keller 1:41:29

And a lot of the literature of that era that the analyses the government reports, the Kerner Commission and all of that. They went back to the issue that we started talking about not having to do with the Riots in the beginning of the discussion, which is frustrations of youth and that there's a continual light motif that goes through all of the literature about frustrated youth. And that and that seems to be when in looking for what pushes things over to violence, that this element, the frustrated youth seems to be one of the factors that pushes things over into violence, the youth are much more likely to go into violence than older people are.

R

Robert Curvin 1:42:08

Oh, yeah. They think they have less to lose.

K

Ken Jackson 1:42:12

You know, God has got most things worked out pretty well, I think. But I think that's a weird one. That as we get older, we get cautious. We hold the wheel with both hands and the kids are whizzing down the street, they've got 50 or 60 years to lose, we got 10.

L

Lisa Keller 1:42:29

They think they're immortal. And so and their their hormones, I don't know what it is. Their emotions are very strong. I hate to say this, I don't want to reduce it to hormones.

R

Robert Curvin 1:42:44

Right, well, how do you classify Penny rates(?) ? Are they rebellions or riots?

L

Lisa Keller 1:42:56

Well, I think I'd rather they were breaking windows in Newark and doing all this other stuff, at least it would be some kind of political statement about will, but this is all self involved stuff. I

mean, that's the other issue of this era of the 60s and 70s. You have some political cause that's outside of yourself, that is for the community. And today there is an absence of that notion and sense of community that is driving you know, political causes. Right. At least that's my feeling.

R

Robert Curvin 1:43:27

Well, I think that there's an enormous amount of alienation out there and I'm not knowledgeable

K

Ken Jackson 1:43:42

We're ready for dinner now.

R

Robert Curvin 1:43:56

The idea of a crowd I mean, you didn't have to create the worst place to, it was the worst place.

K

Ken Jackson 1:44:03

To physically abuse somebody on a hot summer night.

R

Robert Curvin 1:44:04

That's right. Exactly. Exactly.

K

Ken Jackson 1:44:09

And this was the precinct (unintelligable).

R

Robert Curvin 1:44:42

Far as property was, was replaced with there was like a window right in this area here. But that was on the second night. That was not the first night.

K

Ken Jackson 1:44:54

The first when you first got here there's a mob out here

R

Robert Curvin 1:44:57

A mob of people from her right across the street and filling, filling the street. I parked my car

right around the corner there next to the precinct. Now, they recently had a collaboration here, where the mayor showed up, they had a program commemorating the people who were who lots their lives in the Rebellion. And they put up-

K

Ken Jackson 1:45:29

23? Do I remember that number?

R

Robert Curvin 1:45:31

26. They put a plaque up commemorating the those that died. And for some reason the plaque is gone now. I don't know where it is.

K

Ken Jackson 1:45:50

Maybe it's inside?

R

Robert Curvin 1:45:53

Well if it is it's not supposed to be.

K

Ken Jackson 1:45:56

But at the the time that the whole area was uh,

R

Robert Curvin 1:45:58

Public housing, public housing here, a high rise public housing across the street.

K

Ken Jackson 1:46:04

Was that part of Hayes?

R

Robert Curvin 1:46:05

No, that was that uh Stella Wright.

K

Ken Jackson 1:46:10

And there were (unintelligable)

R

Robert Curvin 1:46:14

You had in this in this area, within a radius of about a mile or two, you had three major public housing projects. You had Hayes here, which will first then you had Stella Wright. And then you had a project closer to Springfield Avenue called Scudder Homes. And within that area, you had (unintelligible). for families. One of the city officials in fact said (unintelligible) most volatile, explosive, potentially explosive, ghetto community on the Eastern Seaboard.

K

Ken Jackson 1:47:04

Do you think that either the police department or the mayor's office was aware of were they sensitive enough to have any advisors who said, Be careful? Do you know what's going on? Or they just were not thinking about this at all? I mean reading it backwards.

R

Robert Curvin 1:47:21

Well, well, yeah. If you go back, though, and you read the even the observation of some historians, they said that Newark was trying to do it differently. I mean, Newark did have a Human Relations Commission. There were interracial groups that had formed to try to ameliorate some of the tensions initially. And I think to some extent, the mayor believed in some of the rather modest changes that he was, in fact making. And

K

Ken Jackson 1:47:55

I suppose we should also remember that at the time they thought those big public housing projects were part of the solution, not part of the problem. They just, they were relatively new.

R

Robert Curvin 1:48:04

Absolutely, absolutely. In fact, I recently made the statement, that one of the big issues that you have to look at in Newark's history is the willingness to build so much public housing. And I was quickly challenged by someone in the audience who said, you know, how can you be against public housing? And I said, the truth is, is that I'm not against public housing. In Newark's case, they built a lot of public housing, and screwed it up. They managed it very badly. They use it as a pool of patronage. The standards were not high. The construction itself was not very well done. And the public housing projects were even lower than they, in many ways than they needed to be. There are lots of cities that have have a lot of public housing, and they've done pretty well with public housing.

K

Ken Jackson 1:49:05

(unintelligible) they weren't really well managed.

R

Robert Curvin 1:49:09

They were they were not well managed. They were not well managed.

K

Ken Jackson 1:49:12

Now, this big church around the corner must be the only thing other than the precinct that's still here.

R

Robert Curvin 1:49:17

Well, there are a couple of other churches, but there's not as you can see, there's virtually no commercial activity That's right. You would like to have a corner store and a laundromat and a social club and so on. So nit you don't see much of that. But again, (unintelligable)

K

Ken Jackson 1:49:35

(Unintelligable). (Unintelligable) There's a story here too this may not be (unintelligable)

R

Robert Curvin 1:52:39

(unintelligable) in the Life magazine story about Newark where he was shot actually running with a six pack of beer. And again, they had pictures of the officer then shot him. There was testimony about our guy who was a photographer actually, who was standing by a Life photographer was standing by watching this whole scene unfold and suddenly he looks up and this kid running with a six pack of beer is shot down by a police officer (unintelligable)

K

Ken Jackson 1:54:12

Those plants have access to those (unintelligable). And I read him, I read their answers. It was a piece of paper.

R

Robert Curvin 1:54:21

So what did she says?

K

Ken Jackson 1:54:23

She said she's actually saying the homeowners Loan Corporation. And I actually never did say the homeowners Loan Corporation which was (unintelligable)

R

Robert Curvin 1:54:37

set right here because when in 1968 when Pat and I marry. We lived right on this spot here. Right here. This was a big housing, privately owned housing. The homes look modest. But in those days they were considered to be really quite special. There are lots of people that I know that are involved with it. And uh,

K

Ken Jackson 1:55:24

You know I've never been to the Newark's history meeting. We'll park here somewhere maybe just park on the left.

R

Robert Curvin 1:55:28

See if you can park on the street, yeah right behind here? But they were basically the smart kids who were not going to be able to go to school at Harvard or outside of the city (Unintelligible). It does. Many of them were still involved with their parents businesses. They were also very much of the social group. As I said, you know, they were the kids who were the first to come and join the NAACP chapter. They were the young kids demonstrated with us on the picket line. And even at Weequahic. There were some very strong teachers, union leaders, who were very supportive, of CORE, and very active with us.

K

Ken Jackson 1:57:09

So you were out here then too?

U

Unidentified man 1:57:10

Yeah. It's very different than it was post-1967. (Unintelligible) abandoned cars (unintelligible)

R

Robert Curvin 1:57:51

garbage in the city, you don't see any of that. What you see is really a physically rejuvenating city know whether or not having to ,e the big question is, to what extent is it beginning to reach down to those young kids who are so alienated or the poorest families that are out of work don't have skills, don't have jobs. How do you make this resurgence really have an effect on the people who are generally left out? And I don't think it's an easy answer to that. But I think that's the challenge. If you're going to have a great city, you've got to have a city that can keep itself together. And it's got to address everybody's issues.

K

Ken Jackson 1:58:46

The problem is Newark trying to become more attractive to the middle class and in some ways succeeding.

R

Robert Curvin 1:58:52

Yes, you got the other you got the other side. Yeah.

K

Ken Jackson 1:58:58

That's an that's an American problem. (unintelligible) Depends on local government, so much of its services schools. Fire police

R

Robert Curvin 1:59:14

It's called Martland Hospital and that's now run by the medical school that hospitals it's right part of the medical school complex, that big building in front of us You see the, uh,

K

Ken Jackson 1:59:43

What's this neighborhood called

R

Robert Curvin 1:59:44

This is, we're in the central Ward now. And you see some of this housing that is the the metal. A lot of building going on here. Now this is the medical school. Right there is the product is was created by new Community Corporation. And they actually bought the Pathmark store in partnership here. This is more recent, this development here. And in fact this is really in the last 10 to 15 years that this area has developed.

K

Ken Jackson 2:00:31

(Unintelligible) Now what's this big building on the left?

R

Robert Curvin 2:00:34

This is the hospital. This is the old Martland Hospital that's now run by the medical school. That's part of the medical school program.

K

Ken Jackson 2:00:48

Just nurses housing or-